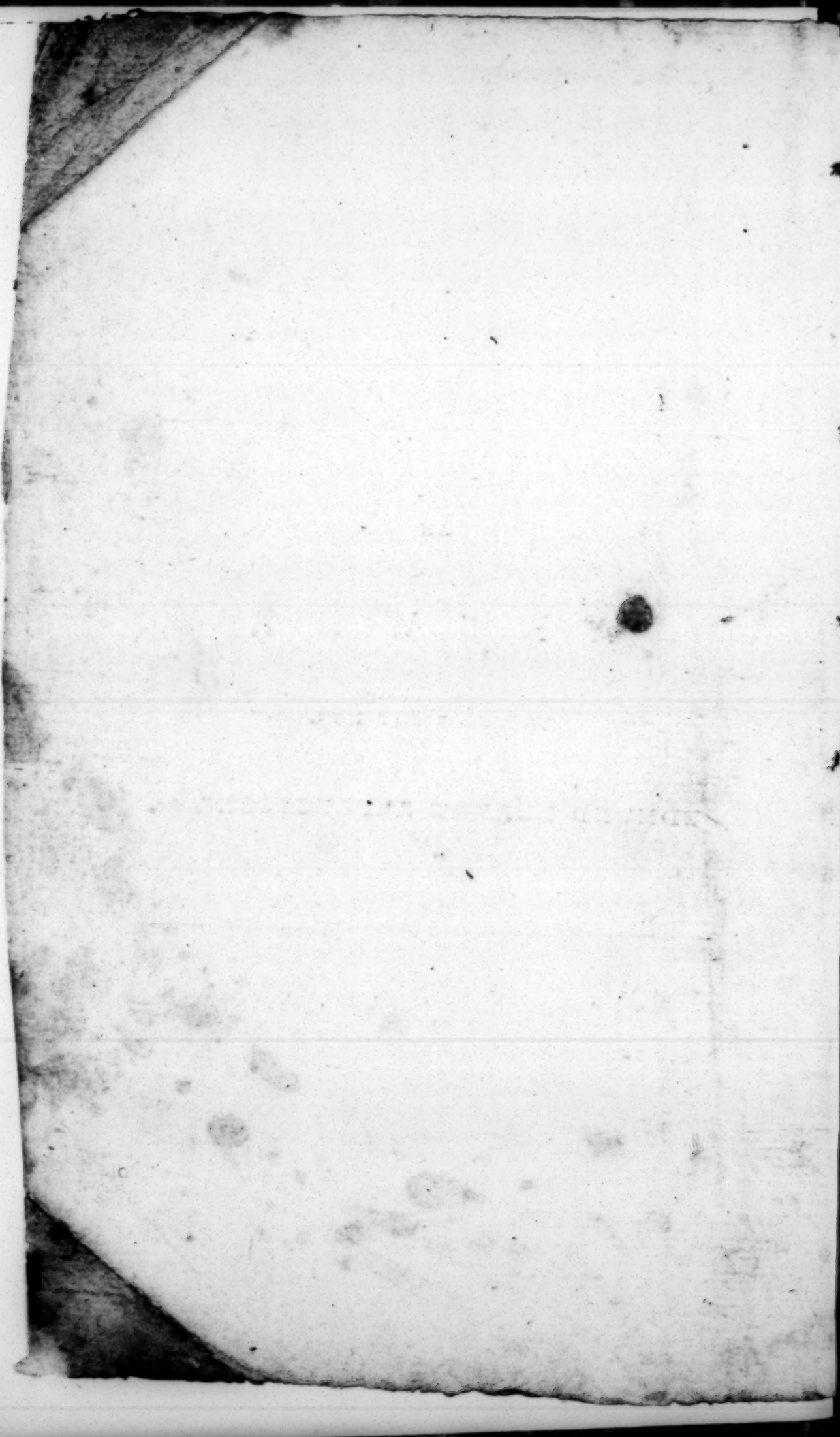


AN

ANSWER

TO THE RIGHT HON.

TOMOND BURKE'S REFLECTIONS, &c.



A N
A N S W E R

TO THE RIGHT HON. EDMUND BURKE'S

REFLECTIONS ON THE REVOLUTION IN FRANCE,

WITH SOME

REMARKS ON THE PRESENT STATE,

OF THE

IRISH CONSTITUTION.

BY AN IRISHMAN.

MR. BURKE'S SPEECH ON AMERICAN TAXATION.

" When I see that a generous Nature has been suffered to take her own Way
" to Perfection.—When I consider how profitable this has been to Us, I
" feel all the Pride of Power sink, and all the Vanity in the Wisdom of
" Human Contrivance, melt and die away within me.—My Rigour relents.
" —I pardon something to the Spirit of Freedom."

DUBLIN:

PRINTED FOR JAMES MOORE, NO. 45, COLLEGE-GREEN.

M DCC XCI.



79... 3811

AN

ANSWER, &c.

BEFORE I begin my animadversions on Mr. Burke's book, I think it right to declare my firm persuasion of his high integrity, and benevolent intentions, my opinion, that where he is unfair it is because he is vehement, and that his errors are those only, which a man, who boasts of the superiority of his passions to his reason, must be expected to fall into.† If, in the course of the argument, my strong reprobation of his principles, as erroneous, should lead me into expressions, that seem to imply dishonesty in him, I beg I may not be so understood.

† P. 119,

B

Principles



Principles in relation to Government have been advanced by him, which I thought were long since exploded, as pernicious to mankind from their tendency, to freeze up each nation for ever in its present situation, whatever may be its inconveniencies; to stop the progress of the world, and to rob the science of politics, which depends on experience of all the benefits of increased experience, which the growing volume of history continually presents. Such principles if admitted would be remarkably injurious to this country: there is perhaps no part of the earth where mistaken politics have done more mischief, or their removal by the diffusion of information more benefit, than in Ireland. It was mistaken policy in the English, to pass acts to restrain our trade, it was a gross mistake in us to suppose we were bound by them; these mistakes were rectified by the very shew of resistance. Heaven rewarded our spirit, the myriads of our manufacturers, who subsisted but by alms, again enjoy the blessings of successful industry, and there is no complaining in our streets. Perhaps it may be a mistake, to suppose that it is a good method of forming a legislative body to dispose of two thirds of the seats in the House of Commons, and an indefinite number in the Lords, to the best bidders, perhaps it is a mistake to suppose it just or politic, to exclude two thirds of our people from civil power. I don't say these are mistakes, but I am confident, that both these questions deserve to be considered on their own merits; if indeed an injunction of silence is to be laid on us from the notion that

“ our

"our rights were as well understood long before we were born as they can be now" that "we should not resist except the necessity admits of no discussion,"* and that "no improvements can be made in morality and scarce any in the principles of Government,"† that is in plain English, that our great grandfathers, who knew not the consequences of the laws they made, were better judges of their utility than we, who see in our history their effects for a century; if these principles be admitted, let us be consistent, and retract those acts which were lately made in the teeth of those principles, let us shackle our trade and surrender our legislation, sure that it is our duty, and our interest, and our glory to conform to the institutions of our ancestors, and ready to solve the apparent objections to this scheme by Mr. Burke's observation, "that the question of Resistance is not to be agitated by common minds."‡

To diminish, as far as in me lies, the mischief of such erroneous opinions, is I think a duty I owe to my country: had it not been for this circumstance, I should certainly have left the national assembly and Dr. Price to fight their own battles; my object is to refute some of Mr. Burke's general principles on the subject of government: I know however there are men, who when in want of direct arguments against the cause of liberty, are glad to avail themselves of such as these; Dr. Price was absurd, therefore all opposition to government is ridiculous, or the French were wicked, therefore reformation is bad. For

* P. 144.

† P. 128.

‡ P. 43.

the sake of such gentlemen, I shall also endeavour to shew that Dr. Price was not so absurd, nor those four and twenty millions of people so wicked, as Mr. Burke in the violence of his candour, and the extravagance of his benevolence has thought proper to represent them.

I do not profess to defend every thing that Dr. Price has said; he like Mr. Burke was an honest, but a warm man, and was betrayed by his passion into violent expressions against a "fallen and afflicted monarch." But Dr. Price's passion was benevolence and the object of his indignation a despot.

Dr. Price lays down three propositions, which Mr. Burke attacks with wonderful fury. It is hard it should be necessary to prove again what has been so often proved, but it will not delay us long. The propositions are,

1st, We have a right to cashier our governors for misconduct.

2dly, We have a right to choose our own governors.

3dly, We have a right to frame a government for ourselves.

We, or any people, have a right to the advantages of government.† We have therefore a right to do whatever

† P. 87.

may be necessary to secure those advantages. The cashiering of our governors may, from their own misconduct, become necessary; therefore we have a right to cashier our governors for misconduct.

Having cashiered them we have still a right to have a government; therefore we have a right to choose new governors.

And if we find, or have sufficient reason to suppose, that the new governors with the old powers will fall into the old misconduct, we have a right so to vary their powers, as may best secure the advantage of government to the society; that is we have a right to frame a government for ourselves. In short we have a right that our government should be useful, and that includes the three others.

Such are the Rights of Resistance which we should desire to know, but dread to exercise; and which, the better they are known, the less occasion there will be to use them.

Woe to him, who from bad motives excites subjects to unnecessary rebellion, robbing them of the blessings of peace and order, which like those of providence, because they are constant and general, are unperceived. Woe to him who from bad motives excites princes to unnecessary severity, who encreases the corruption, which power would

would of itself produce in the human mind, and adds to the evils of oppression, by flattering the ruler, or stifling the complaints of the subject.

He is a good citizen who, in every conflict between governors and governed, determines his conduct by a modest and impartial enquiry into the difference, and into the probable consequences of it, who uses every method of information that the time will permit, and pursues what he thinks his duty with spirit and perseverance, he is right whether he decides for the prince or the subject, he will pursue his object equally regardless of declamation against government, or declamation against resistance, of the clamour of the people or the threats of power "*non civium ardor prava jubentium, nec vultus instantis tyranni mente quatet solidâ.*" He is happy whatever be his fate in this transitory scene, whether his efforts terminate in his success or his destruction.

I acknowledge, that, though these propositions of Dr. Price's are true, they are conveyed in terms not the most judicious. True propositions may be expressed in gentle or provoking language. The terms of "cashiering" and "misconduct" may be thought provoking, but the term to be substituted for misconduct, should so far agree with it as to express error, as well as crime; for there are certainly degrees of intellectual weakness, which justify the people in depriving any governor of his power; which
during

during the indisposition of the king, Mr. Burke frequently admitted.

Nothing proves more clearly the right of ultimate resistance, than the consideration, that if that right did not exist, all the laws, which human ingenuity could contrive, to secure the state from the abuse of power in its governors, would be utterly ineffectual.

Mr. Burke says, "the trust of the Revolutionists for the security of the constitution was not in future revolutions,"* I deny it. They certainly made regulations to diminish the chance of occasion for resistance, but they knew, and every man must know, that the right of resistance was what was to give efficacy to all their regulations. If this did not, a king by his single authority might stop the vital functions of the state, till his people submitted to his will. All the laws in the world to restrain governors are but sentinels to give the alarm; the right of resistance is the main body. A Revolution should indeed be the "last resource of the thinking and the good," but it is well for the thinking and the good, that this last resource is left them, for without it, their laws would be but waste paper, and the most sacred charter no better than a piece of parchment with a lump of wax dangling from the end of it.

On these principles Dr. Price thinks the Revolution was founded: and so one must naturally imagine who considers

* P. 39.

what

what the Revolutionists did. They removed a governor for misconduct, gross and violent enough to justify such a measure, they chose a new one, and in some respects new modelled the government. But Mr. Burke has found a better method of judging of mens principles than by their practices, he discovers them from the preambles they have composed to certain acts of parliament. A wise politician will use the preambles of an act, as a good means of bringing forward such arguments as may be of most use to him with the people, but we can no more discover his principles from his preambles than the motives of a cabinet from the manifestos of princes.—I should rather take my account of the principles of the Revolutionists from their defender Mr. Locke, than from these preambles, and I think there are no differences on the question of resistance between Mr. Locke and Dr. Price.

It is amusing to observe how gently Mr. B. speaks of the Revolution. He knows that the monarch met with incessant, and successful resistance from every description of people; that his very army shouted in his ears at the defeat of his measures; that a foreign prince landed on his shore invited by the people for the purpose of dethroning him; that this invader was joined by multitudes; till at last the officers of the court, and the army, and his very children deserted the king, who abandoned by all fled for his life, to the protection of foreigners. All
this

All this Mr. Burke describes by saying that, "England
 " found itself without a king." † It was a wonderful acci-
 dent: but if there is any nation in the world, where it is
 the general wish of the people, that such an accident should
 befall them, let them imitate the conduct of the English,
 and they may be pretty sure, that in a very short time they
 will " find themselves without a king." In this country we
 were not so happy; we unfortunately had two of them.
 And the destructive civil war that they supported taught us
 to consider the Revolution, as something more than a
 " temporary solution of continuity." ‡—Mr. Burke has
 dwelt very much on the fact, that the Revolutionists chose
 the first heir in the protestant line, but, if he meant to re-
 fute Dr. Price, he should have shewn, not why they chose,
 but that they did not choose at all. For whether they pre-
 ferred king William to king James because he was a better
 christian, or a wiser man, or a braver, or an honest, or for
 all these reasons, they certainly did make a choice, which
 is all that Dr. Price's argument requires. I don't suppose Mr.
 Burke will contend, that the limitation to a particular sect
 of christianity was part of the ancient constitution, or that
 to be governed by a protestant king, was a right which the
 English had inherited from popish ancestors. But sup-
 posing it could follow from the parliaments having chosen
 the first in the protestant line that they made no choice at
 all, the fact would fail us: for king William had no more
 right to the crown, if you exclude the choice of the nation,

† P. 29.

‡ P. 24.

than Philip the second or the Prince of Denmark, besides they might have got a nearer protestant heir than any of the hanover family. The king of Sardinia offered to send his son to be educated a protestant in England. This offer was refused and rightly. The act of settlement had passed; the difference between a nearer, and more remote heir was not worth the disturbing again the minds of the people; there were other objections. But if the principle of the act of settlement had been that the next protestant heir had a claim of right to the throne, the act should have been repealed. If any more arguments were wanting to shew that the Revolution stands on the principles which Dr. Price maintains, Mr. B——'s authority might be brought to prove it: He tells us that "the Revolution was obtained "by a just war;"† that is, the people exercised the right of removing their Governor for a violation of his duty, and that the nation, having removed him, "was free to take what course it pleased for filling the throne, but only free to do so upon the same grounds on which they might have wholly abolished their monarchy, or every other part of their constitution;"‡ that is they had a right to choose their own governor, or governors, and to frame a constitution for themselves.—Those rights they had and did exercise, and the useful and moderate manner in which they did it has gained them the applause of mankind, and the gratitude of their country for an hundred years.

† P. 43.

‡ 27.

Though Mr. Burke has been so unfortunate in attacking Dr. Price's principles; he has had more success in combating two opinions which he puts into his adversary's mouth: These are, that we have derived from the Revolution these rights of resistance and, that "no crown is lawful but the elective."|| But of such silly notions as these there is not a tittle in what Dr. Price has advanced.

As to elective monarchy, Dr. Price, and Mr. Burke hold §, that all authority is derived from the people; but neither of them, nor any one I ever heard of maintained, that the people have no right to appoint hereditary governors.

And who ever imagined that the rights of resistance to oppressive governments, were produced by the Revolution that happened in the year 1688. The Revolution was founded on those rights; not those rights derived from the Revolution. They are as old as man, and as extensive as the world, and were known and exercised by numberless nations, before the English people existed, or their Island was first visited by wandering savages.

Mr. B—— repeatedly asks, with an air of great triumph, "what are the exertions in favour of civil liberty, what are the improvements in church or state, which the

|| P. 31.

§ Mr. B——s, words are, "A popular origin belongs equally to all parts of government and in all forms." *Tracts*, P. 216.

Revolution Society would wish to have accomplished?" And not being able to find any he runs out into a train of most pathetic questions; he asks, "is the monarchy to be annihilated? Is the house of lords to be voted useless? Are all the taxes to be declared grievances? Are we to have universal anarchy and national bankruptcy?"* I do not believe any of these things were designed. But Dr. Price did say, that the people might be better represented; that the test act ought to be repealed; and that our articles and liturgy require revision.

I own I think all these are useful objects of reform, and when Dr. Price had mentioned them so expressly, Mr. Burke's affectation of ignorance is ridiculous. Of the test act I shall only say God be praised we have it not.

The representation of England, Mr. B. says, "answers all the purposes for which a representation of the people can be desired or devised."† And he refutes all the objections to the present system, by this short observation, "Many fallacies lurk under the terms inadequate representation." We are to take his word for it, that all is very right; which he would shew us, but "it requires a long discourse,"‡ and he hates to write a long book: yet I think it would have been well, if he had increased his book, by one page of decisive reasoning against a parlia-

* P. 80.

† P. 83.

‡ P. 83.

mentary reform ; as that would have put an end to the “ shallow speculations of several petulant, assuming, short-sighted coxcombs,” who still think that a parliamentary reform would be a useful measure. I think it would be a useful measure in England ; but I will direct my observations principally to this country, because I know its interest better, and wish it more—and I am sure it is infinitely more necessary to us than to the English.—Their parliament respects the voice of the people ; and that appeared when Mr. Burke, and his party were hurled from their seats for endeavouring to make the king the tool of an insulting aristocracy ; when the voice of the people prevailed over a majority in the house of commons, diminished and controuled that majority in the old parliament, and reduced the party to a minority in the new.—Our parliament and people never agree, except when our parliament fears our people. In all the whimsical chaos of party and principle that prevailed, when the Regency came forward, the parliament, contradicting itself every week, never happened to meet the wishes of the people. I am convinced that a majority of the people would not have been in a hurry to depose the king, lest his speedy recovery should frustrate their intentions ; they would not have censured the Marquis ; they would have passed a pension bill ; and they would have new modified the police.

We want a reform more than they do in England, because our representation is more corrupt. The number
of

of members returned in Great Britain for close † boroughs is less than one half of the whole number of members. With us 220 members are returned for close or corrupt boroughs, which makes between two-thirds and three-fourths of the whole. The assembly so constituted is said to represent the people of Ireland, though two-thirds of that people are excluded from voting, and the remainder return but one third of the assembly.

There is no saying to what extent of folly and depravity such an assembly may proceed, if the diffusion of Mr. Burke's principles of acquiescence should leave them as fearless of the effects of public indignation, as they now are of regular constitutional controul.—Encouraged by the prevalence of such principles, they will talk of expressing the sense of the nation, though if every member, who can be affected by that sense, were to revere it as an oracle, and to attend incessantly, the sense of the nation would be left in contemptible minorities. They will preserve the farce of deliberation, “ when it shall have become notorious that their measures are decided before they are debated;” ‡ when scarce a member within the memory of man, shall have had his vote affected by the arguments advanced! when the numbers on every question will be known many days before the division, and no variation will be found, but

† I reckon all boroughs having 100 votes as close boroughs, though I doubt not many of them are tolerably free.

‡ P. 101. Said of the National Assembly.

but what the occasional prevalence of heat or hunger may produce.

What could be more odious than such an assembly, an assembly, where, declaring in the most solemn manner, and on the most important cases, a law bad, which a member believes to be good; or a proposition false, which he knows to be true, would be called acting with steadiness and consistency? And where the practice of lying (whose very imputation in the most trivial incidents is to be punished at the hazard of life) would lose its atrocity by injuring four millions; and it would be a perfect justification, that the person who commits it, acts as a man who holds a place under the Crown? Where the men, who have decreed a beggar to confinement, who asks a farthing in the street, shall refuse to limit their own importunity for alms, bestowed far worse, at £ 80,000 *per annum*? Where laws will be supported that they may be rejected, by men who declared they would never support them, when they had any apprehension of their success? Where the pursuits of private interest will be so generally understood to be every one's business, that the man who had supported a party for years while they were wrong, and deserted them the first time they happened to be right, being rallied on the ill success of his speculations, will be thought to make a rational excuse, and sufficiently applicable to other people, when he shall answer, he made the best guess he could? Such may be the consequences if
ever

ever there shall exist in this country an assembly of men calling themselves the representatives of the people, of which any man may be a member for £ 2700, and the only essential qualification of the political quack, shall be that demanded of Dr. Laet, "Has he paid his fees?"

So infectious a vice as public venality will spread. The seats of the upper house will become venal also. Some administration, after having pillaged as much as they can venture to do, will fall upon the desperate expedient of selling the highest honours in the state, to raise money to complete the purposes of corruption. The sale of seats in the lower house will produce the sale of peerages. Nobility will be given for weight in the house of commons, and that weight may be obtained for money. A future administration may suppose that the people will acquiesce in a mode of obtaining support to government without public burthen: but that administration will be mistaken. The people, who obtained the supreme judicial power for the house of peers, will not suffer that power to become a nuisance. They know that property must be insecure, and diminished in value, the moment the last resort for justice becomes corrupt; they know, that if the most avowed corruption has been introduced into the lower house, it has been principally by the power of purchasing seats; and they expect, that the introduction of the same practice among the lords will do away the very pretences to public virtue, and "take away from those that have not, that which they seemed to have:" they know that the judicial power is
more

more tempting to a corrupt man than the legislative ; that the legislator's act affects himself—the judge's not ; that the legislator's affects small interests of great numbers, the judge's great interests of individuals, which makes the bribe more probable and more secret ; they know that when peerages are brought to open market, some will certainly be found ready to pay for being judges, that they may sell justice ; and that interest and vanity united will outbid vanity alone ; they know that the low price of peerages will encourage such shameful speculations ; and they are convinced, that they might as well look for chastity in the mistress of a brothel, as expect that the procurer of prostituted legislators should become an incorrupt judge.

Such may be hereafter the effect on the house of lords, of the sale of seats in the house of commons :—already it has corrupted the public opinions and practice of vast numbers of the community. *Hinc fonte derivata clades in patriam populumque fluxit.* Hence patriotism is considered as a chimera, and private and public character altogether unconnected, and corruption the true and only instrument of government. This last position, though sneaked from by the administration of all others to whom its establishment would have been most convenient, is yet so confidently maintained, that we must suspend our indignation long enough, to give it a decisive refutation. I lay down then as an established truth, that every society of human creatures who wish for protection from internal or external violence,



lence, will consent to pay those who will protect them, and are willing to agree that some individuals should direct the public power to those purposes ; every society wishes therefore for some government ; he who attempts to deny this, is contradicted by the history of mankind from the deluge to this day—if this be admitted, opposition to government must derive its chief support from its excessive expence, or the indignation which honest men feel at its abuses, or the designs the ambitious may have of getting power into their own hands, by taking advantage of the faults of administration. Now, how is corruption to repress opposition ? are the designs of the interested to be calmed, by making the objects of their desires more valuable ? is the indignation of the honest to be suppressed, by bribing men to tell lies ? or the public expences diminished, by taxes to pay their hire ?

But some people think it a sufficient answer to all complaints against our government, that the country is thriving : how reasonable this ! to suppose we should submit to a bad government, because we are flourishing, when we know that we flourish, because we did not submit.

I hope we shall never have occasion to reform our government by violence : but the tenet, that “ no violent resistance is justifiable except where the necessity admits of no discussion,”† would damp the spirit of constitutional resis-

† P. 144.

tance ;



tance; because there is no resistance so legal, as may not, in its necessary consequences, engage us in such a situation, that we must have recourse to violence, or yield essential rights, and own the nation defeated. In the whole course of the dispute, every step of government may be defended by pretended legal fiction, or remote analogy, and these will not only admit, but require discussion. It is when we are in prosperity we should reform, when we can be sure of time, and strength, and coolness: most reformatations have been attempted in times of distress, because the government is more weakened than the people: and hence reformation is dreaded; for the consequences of preceding distress are confounded with those of reformation, and the change produces greater temporary evil, than it would at another time. The holders of boroughs should press a reform, if they wish for a compensation; in some years the nation will be too much provoked with them, and too much in debt, to be willing or able to give it. Those who wish their country well should press a reform, if they wish for a peaceable one, if it be delayed for many years it will occasion a convulsion in this country. As little as Mr. B—— has said of a parliamentary reform, I expect it had a greater proportion of his indignation, than many subjects mentioned in Dr. Price's work, against which his eloquence has been more diffuse. Perhaps even, if this single subject had been omitted, the queen of France had lost the finest eulogium ever given to mere beauty, and Mr. Burke had been as ignorant to this day, of the detail of the disadvan-

tages of the departments, communes, and cantons, as most of his readers are, after having finished his book. Mr. Burke has a particular aversion to a reform—no wonder—he is a man of party, and his party have found a more steady support from boroughs, than from the favour of the people, which they found, by woeful experience, to be a fleeting treasure, earned with difficulty, and lost with ease. Besides a parliamentary reform was brought forward by Mr. Pitt, and Mr. Burke has never shewn any remarkable partiality for his measures.

But perhaps we should not indulge ourselves in these speculations, however interesting they appear to us, perhaps it is overweening conceit, which makes us suppose, we can see any defects in the institutions of our ancestors; for Mr. B—— tells us “that the rights of man were as well understood long before we were born as they can be now;” and that “we are to expect very little improvement in the principles of the art of government.”§ Though these are Mr. Burke’s words, I am satisfied they do not convey his own opinion on the subject; but are expressions into which he was hurried by the torrent of his eloquence, without sufficiently reflecting on their import or effect. In fact he frequently contradicts them, he says, “he would not exclude alterations,”† and recommends reformation analogous to the constitution; but I know that the general effect of his book will be, to make men despair

§ P. 128.

† P. 355.

of improvements, and I know that his assertions and his arguments, though contradicted by himself, will be quoted triumphantly, by the obstinate sticklers for indefensible abuses, who will shield their own selfishness, and corruption, with his integrity, his eloquence, and his errors.

The art of politics like other arts depends for its perfection on the number of recorded experiments which have been made in it. All the revolutions which empires have suffered; all accounts of the rise, progress, and decline of states; nay every law that has been passed, every political event with its consequences; all these may be considered as experiments in politics with their results, the number of these recorded experiments encreases with the history of the world, and therefore the art of politics must improve. It must do so from the encrease of its materials, it must do so also from the encrease of its necessity. A state of savages, who subsist by the chase, requires but a simple policy; where there is scarce any property there need be but few laws—in such a state every family supplies its own wants. But when the encrease of population limits possession, what is left becomes necessary to subsistence, and must be secured: it becomes necessary that individuals should apply themselves to particular pursuits, that the community may have the advantage of skill; hence each depends on the others in a variety of ways in which they did not before, and an immense multiplicity of additional regulations becomes necessary. As society advances, men
are

are better informed and will not bear the weak and ill-directed policy, to which they formerly submitted. Without an improvement of political constitutions the earth could not supply its inhabitants, and those who know any thing of the early state of the nations recorded in history, are well aware, that it was the awkwardness of their constitutions, which prevented them from having greater numbers on the same spot, and forced them to encourage frequent emigrations. Politics, like every other art conducive to the well being of society, is more necessary in proportion as the numbers of mankind encrease, the earth the fund for their subsistence remaining the same. Its practitioners, like those of any other art, have the encreasing demand for their exertions to stimulate, and the success and errors of those who went before to direct and to warn them. I must see some circumstance in which it essentially differs from all other arts and sciences in the world before I can possibly admit that it is not in its own nature progressive. Mr. B—— says “jurisprudence is the collected wisdom of ages;” I suppose in most ages something has been collected, if so, jurisprudence has improved, and the rights of men are “better understood now than they were long before we were born.”

Aristotle says in his politics, (one of the best of his works) that some nations are destined by nature to slavery. Mr. Burke thinks not: it was held once that captives in war were justly sold for slaves; I don't suppose Mr. B. thinks so, or that he agrees with Cranmer and Calvin that man
should

should be burnt for religious opinions.† It was held by many men of high character, and consummate knowledge for their time, that kings governed by divine right: this Mr. B—— calls an antiquated notion; not very consistently, since he says we should adhere to our “prejudices the more the older they are,”† be that as it may he rejects the opinion, and I suppose he will not deny that he in these particulars is a better politician than the favourers of divine right, and Cranmer and Calvin, and Aristotle, and the millions of sensible men for their time, who have received these most important errors. If he admits it, he must believe that the rights of men are better understood now than they were formerly, he himself is an answer to his book, and his own excellence proves his error.

Yet this excellence is rather with respect to those who went before him, than his cotemporaries, for I suppose no well informed disinterested man could be found, who would not join with Mr. Burke, in rejecting the errors I have mentioned. This superiority of political knowledge belongs not to the individual but to the age. Mr. B—— would ask, why should we suppose this last age superior to all others? I answer because it is the last: and so says Lord Bacon, *Quemadmodum majorem rerum humanarum notitiam ab homine sene expectamus quam a juvene propter experientiam et rerum quas vidit, et audivit et cogitavit*

† The interference of the state in religious opinions is part of politics.

† P. 129.

varietatem et copiam eodem modâ et a nostra ætate majora multa quam a priscis temporibus expectare par est.

Mr. B—— admits that in some cases we may be right in supposing ourselves wiser than our ancestors; and he would have given the French leave, if they did not like the precedents of the two last centuries, to have passed them over; now if we may reject the opinions of two centuries, because we dont like them, why not of three? are we to reject all that we dont like? what becomes of the sacredness of antiquity? If indeed Mr. B—— has discovered, that it is presumptuous and almost impious in us, to reject the opinions of our ancestors, which yet in some cases he himself thinks we ought to do, he should certainly have taught us, if he could, some method of distinguishing our fallible from our infallible predecessors: for my part I am satisfied they were all fallible, and that their opinions scarcely deserve more weight, than those of an equal number of men, of equal integrity and information, existing at this day. Nor do I think the opinions of any men deserve weight, except as presumptive proofs of the existence of reasons for those opinions, and in this respect, antiquity has a trifling advantage from the greater probability of the reasons being lost: but these probabilities of the existence of proofs are weak indeed, when compared with proofs seen and applied. There is a great difference between rejecting the opinions of antiquity, and reversing its decrees; for the former truer opinions should be produced,
for

for the latter more useful decrees ; and that regulation which would have been more useful, if established at first, may not be so now, when another has been established. But notwithstanding Mr. B——'s violent veneration for his ancestors, I find there is one opinion in which he certainly contradicts them, and which is of infinite importance ; an opinion, which they have shewn by their practice, an opinion that good citizens may improve the constitution of their country. They no more intended that we should be bound up for ever by their decrees, than they were by those of their ancestors. It was the spirit of improvement that produced those institutions we admire ; shall we embrace the effects and reject the cause ? or conclude from the excellence of the effects, that the cause is pernicious to mankind ? Mr. B——'s notion, of considering the foundation of all our rights to be an inheritance from our ancestors, may do well for those who have received from their ancestors a good inheritance, but what are they to do whose liberty has no bearings or ensigns armorial, " no gallery of portraits nor settlements in tail." They must purchase freedom, though it be with their blood : well may such men feel that honest pride, which Mr. Burke calls " upstart insolence : " well may they be proud of acquiring for their posterity what others are so proud of receiving from their ancestors " it is better to give than to receive."

There are some who will allow, that the art of politics has improved hitherto, but hold that it is now at that point

of perfection, which it never can pass. Of such I would ask, whether all other arts and sciences have also come, within these few last years, to their utmost perfection, and if they have not I expect they will shew me why they suppose this of politics; in the mean time I will give them some of the reasons that induce me to think that politics will be one of the last of all the sciences in arriving at ultimate perfection. In every science some first principles, whether you call them intuitions or observations, are necessary; and by comparing these and reasoning from them the science is advanced; but as all reasoning is uncertain, where a sufficient number of these first principles are not ready for application; that science will be the last in arriving at perfection, where the number of such principles is most, and the difficulty of acquiring them greatest. Accordingly we find, that mathematics, in which the first principles were few and obvious, has advanced farther and sooner towards perfection, than astronomy; astronomy than mechanics; mechanics than chemistry; and all in my opinion than the art of government; because the modifications of human wants and passions, the effects of situations and regulations on the human mind, are more various and difficult to be observed, than the modifications of figure, or quantity, or motion, or the changes which inanimate bodies produce on each other. The art of politics will be late in arriving at perfection, because it is more opposed by human passions than any other. Political enquiries affect mens' interests too strongly, to be pursued
with

with the same calmness and patience, which may be given to an astronomical investigation, that can deprive no man of his place, or his pension; can hurt no man's fortune, and mortify no man's pride.

There are at this moment states, whose situations we may consider, as experiments of the utmost importance in politics. The history of America may decide questions, which speculation could never determine. America may satisfy a future age on these important points.—

Whether a country whose extent is greater than Europe can remain united and free, under a representative government? whether it can have an efficient executive power, and a permanent constitution, without a king, without a court, without nobles, without an established religion? and whether the cause of christianity can be supported without the assistance of the Athanasian creed? The French Revolution will teach nations, not to neglect their grievances, till they become too heavy to be borne, yet too complicated to be thrown off without violence and blood. It will teach kings, that a standing army may be infected with a popular enthusiasm, and its final success will (I hope) teach the world, that patient continuance in the pursuit of so great a blessing as a just and impartial government, will by no means lose its reward. The overthrow of their hierarchy (which I am far from justifying) may however teach useful lessons: it will shew that an obstinate adher-

ence to ancient errors, by encreasing infidelity, will bring the establishment itself into danger; and will teach the rulers of other churches to retreat in time from the weak out-works of religion that human fancy has drawn round it, into the unexpugnable fortress of divine revelation.

Even the English, from their abhorrence of political empirics, are likely to make themselves the subject of a most hopeless experiment. I am afraid they intend to try, what will be the event of so rigid an adherence to their present constitution, as shall exclude all alterations and improvements, and even renovations. I am afraid they mean to try, whether by standing still whilst the rest of mankind are advancing, they can preserve their relative place among the kingdoms of the earth.†

Government says Mr. B——, is the contrivance of human wisdom for supplying human wants. These contrivances must improve as those wants encrease, and those wants will encrease with the numbers of the inhabitants of

† To those who hold the English constitution to be the most perfect possible, and a fixed form of government, derived from a long line of ancestors, I would suggest that the king had in England till the act of union, and has to this day in this country, the power of creating as many boroughs as he thinks proper and of giving them what charters he thinks proper, and so may constitute boroughs which shall always return the creatures of the crown: thus he may pour in members at pleasure to bear down opposition in the house of commons: he may do the same in the house of lords, and so become sole legislator.

the

the earth ; how then can we imagine, that the art of government is perfected, when the globe is far from being peopled. The vast tracts in America which a few savage tribes possess, or the pathless forests of New Holland where the human foot has never penetrated, may become the seats of great and wise, and mighty empires, which by enjoying our experience while they avoid our corruption, and escape our prejudices, may attain unhoped for heights of virtue and happiness.

The faculty of improving from age to age, is one of the most marked advantages of human nature. The creatures of instinct are stationary, rational beings improve. The general tendency of Mr. B—'s work seems to be, to diminish this superiority of mankind ; to extol our instincts, and to decry our reason, and to keep as close as possible to the glorious privilege of the beasts of the field, " the great cattle that chew the cud and are silent." † In speaking of the French nation I must distinguish their cause from that of the national assembly : having at the desire of their monarch, entrusted their state into the hands of an assembly, chosen by themselves, they were bound by every tie of prudence and duty, to wait for a reasonable time, till they could judge of the effects of the regulations which that assembly had made, and not risk a civil war, to correct a few violent or ill-judged measures ; especially when that assembly had punctually obeyed their instructions, and had

† P. 127.

obtained

obtained them many invaluable advantages. What then is the nation to be blamed for, is it for determining to change their constitution? Mr. B—— does not blame them for that, he “does most heartily wish, that France may be animated with a spirit of rational liberty; and thinks her bound to provide a permanent body, in which that may reside, and an effectual organ by which it may act.”† The nation did no more than comply with Mr. Burke’s wish: the violent consequences which ensued (except the savage outrages of an incensed rabble, for which the nation at large are not to be blamed) were no more than must have been expected from so violent a change, in a nation situated as the French were: yet for this compliance with his wish, and the consequences of it, Mr. B—— represents the French nation as “rebelling against a mild and lawful monarch, as revolting from protection, and aiming a blow at a hand which held out graces, favours and immunities.”†

I should have expected from this author more justice to the spirit of liberty, to that spirit, which he himself, by fostering the American Revolution, (the parent of the French) had actually contributed to produce in France. I should have expected from him that instead of running out into an extravagant invective against a whole nation, he would have stated, with what he supposed their faults, what he knew to be their provocations. But forgetting the misery

† P. 2.

† P. 56.

of millions, he employs the whole pathos of his eloquence, in describing the sufferings of two individuals, with whom, if they stood upon their personal merits in common life, no man of sense, or woman of decency, would deign to associate; two persons who were designed by providence, for provoking and facilitating the French Revolution.

The French laboured under severe and complicated oppression. Their government had artfully strengthened its foundation by giving vast advantages and immunities to a body of 200,000 nobility, and an army of 150,000 men; they were supported by as many collectors of the revenue, and a multitude of spies; against any of this vast body of oppressors, an individual of any other class of the community, scarce ever, if I am rightly informed, could obtain impartial justice:† this system brought oppression, extortion, and insult home to every man's door, and the immense army of spies banished all confidence and comfort from society.† The nobles had the exclusive right to every post of honour in the army and the state, and treated all others as beings of an inferior nature, however superior to them in information, fortune and every other qualification. The poor peasant paid a variety of taxes from which the opulent noble was exempt. He dared not use sea-water to dress his meat, or even dip his vessels in the ocean, lest the king should want a customer for the salt, which he forced

‡ This indeed was not to be expected when we recollect that their judges bought their places like our p—s.

† Tableau de Paris, vol. I. chap. 40.

on him to what quantity he pleased, and at four times the value; he was enjoined on pain of death, to suffer the animals reserved for the amusement or the luxury of his lord, to destroy with a delegated despotism the labour of his hands, and the hopes of his children's subsistence.

By the natural influence of a corrupt and despotic government, the nobility were drawn from the country, where their manners were comparatively pure, and their expences enriched the most useful part of the community they were collected into a most licentious court, in which the most profligate women ruled with uncontrouled power; these women had the patronage of the state, the bar, the army, and the church in their hands; and at their toilets were the last resorts of justice. Crowds of the young nobility paid them their addresses, concealing their interested designs for the advancement of their own fortunes, under the affectation of vanity and of vice, and made use of their power over the passions of other mens wives, for the perversion of justice, in favour of themselves or their friends. This was so far from being considered as wrong, that a man, who wanted a living, or a place, or had a suit pending in their courts, was thought ignorant of the world, if he did not immediately endeavour to make his party with the ladies. Is a provision in the church to be procured for a young Abbe, whose character is a scandal to his order? Is a suit to be decided against law and justice, and common sense? A woman of fashion allows a bishop, or a judge

a judge, to put on her slipper next morning, and the thing is done. I hope we shall never be deficient in that kind attention, and heartfelt tenderness, which constitutes the true homage which the sex should receive; but we may venture to say, that such obedience was by no means dignified, nor such submission what any man should be proud of†.

The very amusements of the French were saddened with the cloud of despotic power.—“ *On voit distinctement mettre le bal dans le fusil ou vont paraître les ris et les jeux.*”‡ A sanguinary police, whose expence was part of their suffering, broke up their innocent amusements, insulted them for every trifle, and reminded them perpetually what a government they were under.

It would be endless to relate all the sufferings of the French—but it is not necessary to their justification to do it. It has been said by experienced politicians, that a very bad government may yet be supported, while there is bread in the market, and justice in the palace.—The French endured their government, till both had failed them.

The revenue alone would have brought about the revolution. Their system of taxation was every way bad. The poor paid taxes the nobles were exempt from: the

F clergy

† P. 113.

‡ Tableau de Paris.

clergy had various immunities, even the several provinces were differently taxed. "The taille, that grievous and destructive imposition, which all their financiers lamented, was rated by the intendant of each generality on the presumed fortune of every individual below the rank of a gentleman."* This was a tax that seemed peculiarly designed for dispute, vexation, and oppression, as its principal objects.

The salt-tax I have mentioned †. A detail of oppression is uninteresting to us, though dreadful to the sufferers; But a quotation from Mr. Burke, may give us a tolerable idea of the state of the French Revenue in 1769. "The annual income of that state is, at this day," says he, "£ 1,350,000 short of a fraction, for their ordinary peace establishment. Indeed under such extreme straits and distraction labours the whole system of their finances, that no man, who has considered their affairs with any degree of attention, or information, but must hourly look for some extraordinary convulsion in that whole system, the effect of which on France, and even on all Europe, it is difficult to conjecture." ‡

Did this situation of the French finances produce any well directed effort to reform their system of taxation?

No—

* Burke's Tracts, p. 59.

† This is the tax for promising to repeal which Mr. B. blames the National Assembly.

‡ Tracts, p. 59.

No—they went on from bad to worse, blundering in spite of experience. With the right of imposing what taxes they pleased, they could not get any which could equalize the revenue and the expence: the derangement was not the effect of temporary distress, or temporary mismanagement; it came to its utmost, after the continuance of peace, when the revenue was directed by a man of eminent skill, and unquestioned integrity. It must have arisen from general defects. All modes of draining the nation were tried, with no effect, except that of increasing the public distress. If the people were too poor to pay one tax, and abstained from the articles taxed, they were to be relieved by laying on a new tax—After having exhausted invention, and satiated caprice, the French government declare they are no longer able to provide for public expences, or support the public credit; they called upon the nation to undertake this task, upon the performance of which, the continuance of their society was supposed to depend: they obeyed the call, “ the call of man and of “ God;” † and for obeying it, they are stigmatized, as having engaged in an unprovoked and barbarous rebellion: if they had not obeyed it, they would indeed have rebelled against their king and their country, against reason, against nature, and against God. The people of France perceived the necessity of diminishing the public expence, of letting the most wealthy no longer be favoured in public contribution, and of making the taxes productive, by rendering

† Burke.

dering the people free: besides they thought it but just, since government had requested their assistance, that they should insist on an impartial government as the terms of their support. In these wishes and views the nation at large may be supposed to have concurred; "the very head and front of their offending had this extent, no more."

The nation at large is not to be called to account, either for the outrages of the mob, or the errors of the National Assembly, no more than the English nation are to be condemned for the riots of Lord George Gordon's mob, or the attempt of a junto in their parliament, to monopolize the influence of India, and break the power of the crown. The duty of the French was, to receive with gratitude a change, which on the whole was an astonishing blessing; and to trust to time, and to further opportunity, for improving what was imperfectly finished.

"Government," says Mr. B. "is the contrivance of human wisdom for the supply of human wants." The French by long and painful experience were convinced, that their first contrivance was altogether insufficient; they have tried another, and, without waiting for some reasonable period, they cannot tell whether this second contrivance may not answer their purpose.

Was there any thing in the conduct of the National Assembly which could justify the nation in rising in arms against them, by which they would either have thrown themselves into inextricable anarchy, or forced the reins of government into the hands of those very men, who had just rejected them in despair. If they had done so, they would have reduced themselves to the most wretched of all situations; no remonstrance against oppression would have been heard; their government would have been above all fear; for the ill success of their efforts for liberty, when supported by the court, would have furnished a short and unanswerable objection, to every attempt at resistance. Was the imprisonment of the King a measure which could justify the people in rejecting their new constitution? This step, which it is not to be wondered at that those, who feel much and reason little, should condemn in the gross, because accompanied with circumstances at which human nature revolts; this very step, if we are rightly informed of the circumstances that led to it, was in its design a measure of justice, of necessity, of prudent spirit, and humane prevention; it saved the nation a civil war, at the expence of fifty lives. The King and Queen, if we are rightly informed, had excited a dangerous sedition among the troops; had caused them to reject, in the most contemptuous manner, the mark of their adherence to the legal government of their country, and publicly and personally thanked them for so doing. With a body of forces to cover their retreat, they might in a few days have reached
their

their frontiers, and with the assistance of a foreign army, and the enemies of liberty, they might have deluged the kingdom with blood, robbed twenty four millions of their necessary, unquestionable, legal rights; and blasted for ever all their prospects of prosperity, all their hopes of happiness.

I say, the people had a right to prevent those consequences. Mr. Burke says, "Englishmen might enter into "a just war† against their king." I say, Frenchmen might do so too: and if ever a nation had a right to make war on its king, it must be when the king has already commenced a war against the nation. It was not on account of an illegal tax, or an illegal proclamation, that the French took up arms against their monarch. The army was prepared that was to brave the legal government of the kingdom; requiescence for a few days or hours, might have deprived of their hopes of freedom existing millions, and numberless generations.

The French nation, or the people of Paris, had a right to engage in that war; and having once engaged, the crime, or the merit of rebellion was fixed for ever; whether the war had terminated in the defeat of the nation, or in the death, the banishment, or captivity of the king. Happy the country whose rebellion terminates in his captivity; whether that be the effect of accident, of policy, or humanity.

† Burke p. 123.

humanity. By such a termination, the nation has a hostage against its enemies, the king's person is preserved, the succession is uninterrupted, and the regal power may be restored, by such gradual concessions as are most consistent with the public security.

In the execution of the design of seizing the king's person, the mob of a licentious capital, whose profligacy and irreligion, misery, ignorance, and multiplied vices, their government had principally occasioned; who when worn down with oppression, had been suddenly intoxicated with the hopes of liberty, were now fired with fury at the prospect of losing it, did commit acts which it is horrid to relate: but we should not forget that their government had taught them to mangle human forms; and that their fury and savageness are fairly to be referred to that detestable despotism, which had almost degraded the dregs of the nation, below the ranks of human creatures.

Mr. B—— acknowledges, that “if the king and queen of France had formed a scheme for massacring the national assembly, he should have thought their captivity just, and he adds, much more ought to have been done.”† He means I suppose they should have been put to death. Now it is certainly not easy to massacre a large assembly, defended by a numerous army; such an intention can hardly be conceived: but if Mr. B—— means, that the king should

† P. 123.

have been put to death, for making war on the national assembly; the consequence is astonishing: see the friend of kings, and enemy of violence, in a moment of the calmest reflection, recommend an action, which a licentious, ignorant, enraged rabble, with every thing to goad, and nothing to restrain them in all the maddening triumph of slavery over despotism, in all "the fury of their Theban and Thracian orgies," "hot from the assembly of hell" never thought of perpetrating.—Mr. B——, does not believe the king attempted to make war on the nation, because he supposes, if so, the national assembly would not have left him any power. But there were abundant reasons for doing so, notwithstanding his faults; it was known he was rather weak than wicked; he preserved some affection even from the people whom his errors had brought so near destruction; he filled the throne to the exclusion of dangerous talents; his name and authority, though ever so imaginary, was of considerable use in supporting government; the reduction of his power was a security against tyranny; its preservation against anarchy; an argument, which supposes it impossible that the national assembly, have been influenced by any of those reasons, is not to be relied on. Indeed the method of arguing against the truth of facts established by good testimony, from what we suppose ought to have been done if they had happened, is so generally acknowledged to be weak, that it deserves notice on no other account, but that of its proceeding from Mr. B——.

I do

I do not justify the seizing the king, except on the ground of his having shewn hostile intentions to the national assembly ; it is difficult for us at this distance to procure impartial accounts of events which it is the interest of so many to misrepresent : but Mr. B——'s admitting, that the “† king did once from a frailty incident to a prince, think it necessary to provide force, against the desperate designs manifestly carrying on against his person and the remains of his authority,” confirms my opinion, that the account generally received is true.

Mr. B—— frequently arraigns the French irreligion, without even hinting at its cause. A man who has imbibed thoroughly the spirit of christianity, will not judge its rejectors, without considering their situation. The French when they thought of religion, saw nothing but proud prelates, lazy monks, licentious abbès, superstitious idolatrous rights, absurd, contradictory, immoral tenets ; they concluded hastily, but naturally, that this heap of folly and wickedness, could not have been built on a religion, from the pure, and omniscient Being.—But they ought to have examined the scriptures themselves ; certainly. But who are they that do all that they ought to do ? who are we that condemn them ? How many are there among us who reject christianity, disgusted with some human additions, few and innocent indeed compared with those with which popery has loaded it ; look at the writings of the

† P. 122.

French against christianity, you will see that it is against popery that their arguments are directed; christianity they knew not.

The French rejected revelation, because they saw it under the mask of popery, and that was the fault of their despotic government, which had banished those who attempted to tear off that mask, and therefore their rejection of revelation was the fault of their despotic government.

I acknowledge that their rejection of christianity (which however I am convinced has taken place with but a small number compared with the whole mass of the people) was occasioned partly by the laxity of their morals; but this laxity was principally occasioned by the profligate example of their court, and this court derived its means in luxury, and its weight in example, from their despotic government. Their despotic government encreased the depravation of their morals, and prevented the reformation of their religion, therefore it was their despotic government that made them irreligious. We hope the author of christianity will intercede for those, who by the fault of their rulers rejected him, as he did for those who murdered him by the fault of their rulers, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Mr. B—— ought not to have forgot, that the French protestants are in the foremost ranks of the friends of liberty, that many of most weight in the assembly are of that description, and that their religious principles have been tried in the fire; and I am not without hopes that the
liberty

liberty of the press, the spirit of reformation, and even the excessive dislike of antiquity, which at present prevails in France, may considerably encrease the numbers of protestants. How far upon the whole the cause of civil liberty has been aided by the enemies of christianity I know not ; but sure I am that the friends of christianity should be the friends of civil liberty also ; sure I am, that there is nothing in christianity to inspire aristocratic ideas, or justify the depression or neglect of the common people. The gospel was announced to shepherds, abiding with their flocks ; the apostles were fishermen ; and the messenger of heaven " had not where to lay his head ;" it was " hard for a rich man to enter into his kingdom ;" " few of the rulers believed on him ;" " but to the poor the gospel was preached." And when its heavenly preacher, by the artifices of perfidious rulers, was crucified and slain, " the people who saw that light beat their breasts and returned"—" The apostles were persecuted by the rulers, but had great favour with all the people ;" and when the magistrates did not use them with violence, it was, " because they feared the people lest they should be stoned."

What say the precepts and doctrines of our religion ?
 " Woe to those that add house to house and field to field till there be no place that grind the faces of the poor."
 " Woe to those that offend the least of these little ones."
 " The kings of the gentiles exercise lordship over them but it shall not be so with you, but he that is greatest among

you let him be as a servant." "Love one another," "let no one seek his own but every one another man's well being." "Do as you would be done by:" "Ye are all brethren." "God is no respecter of persons."

If, upon the whole, the French have not gone farther in the spirit of free-thinking and free acting, than was naturally to be expected, when twenty-five millions emerge from the extremes of superstition and despotism; if the riots that are to be referred to the revolution (which were compared with those produced by famine) were not more than were to be expected in such a change; the French as a nation are not to be condemned. That their confusion and bloodshed has been less than could be expected, we have the testimony of our politicians, whose cry, since the beginning of the Revolution, has been, they must have a civil war. Their sanguinary speculations have not yet been verified, and I earnestly wish they never may. Whether I have the right side of the question or not, I certainly have the pleasant one. I shall enjoy unmixed delight, and honest triumph, from the success of my fellow creatures, nor shall my pleasure from the happiness of such a portion of mankind be damped with the mortification of frustrated prediction.

Mr. B—— is highly displeased with the choice of the persons that composed the tiers etat; I suspect that choice was natural and almost unavoidable. The first wish of the people

people on the calling of the states, must have been, to reduce the power of the crown, and the nobility, and to subject the whole kingdom to an impartial system of taxation. To effect these purposes, Mr. B—— would have had them chuse men of practical experience in the state, that is placemen under a despotic government. They chose men of less rank, of some practice in legal business, whose views, they had reason to hope, were agreeable to their own. Of great and distinguished magistrates they often knew nothing, but that they were connected with the court; and this was the ground of a strong, and natural distrust.

Many men were included of known rank and consummate talents. Where such men, with principles favourable to the Revolution, were known to the electors, I believe they were seldom neglected: in a country where few could act politically, the characters of few could be known. But let us not condemn them for mistakes, till we, who have full information, shew greater sagacity, in the choice of our own representatives.

The tiers etat then must have been constituted, nearly as it was; and from its being so constituted Mr. B—— thinks every thing evil must have followed. If any thing has been done well, their glory is the greater. The national assembly have suppressed venal, discordant, untrouled, unconnected, arbitrary judicatures, and established a useful, uniform system in their place; they have changed

an accidental aggregation of provinces into a nation ; they have suppressed monastic vows ; laws for the preservation of game, by the diminution of mankind ; they have established a representation of the people, sufficiently equal ; an equal system of taxation ; liberty of the person ; liberty of conscience ; liberty of the press, and the trial by jury ; and they were the first national council that ever declared the natural abhorrence of a war for conquest. Were these things not worth being mentioned, by a man who wrote on the Revolution of France ? Why has not Mr. B. mentioned them ? Because he chose to impeach the National Assembly, rather than to examine their conduct. —Every man, and every council of men, is a mixture of wisdom and folly, of virtue and of vice ; and it is only by doing what Mr. B. condemns, by weighing the good and evil against each other, that we can form a just view of the character of a party.

Mr. B. blames the National Assembly for departing from the old constitution of the States General.—But why are old constitutions to be adhered to ? unless it is, that they are familiar to the people, and venerated by them. If that was not the case, as I am satisfied it was not, then there was no reason for not departing from that constitution, when it was found considerably inconvenient for giving efficacy to the public will.

They

They are blamed for the folly of laying down abstract principles of government, for setting out with a declaration of rights. They were perfectly right. It was their first duty to shew the people what was to be hoped from the expected reform, and so to encourage them to face the dangers of a revolution with firmness, and bear with patience the pains of reformation.

Mr. B. speaks of this declaration, as if it asserted a perfect equality among the members of society. The first article says, "Men are equal with respect to their rights;"—that is, that no man should have an advantage over another in claiming his rights, or that all should have equal justice: in this sense, the expression of the declaration has been always used in every Grammar of morality. The second part of the article, which says that civil distinctions have their ground in public utility, guards, if it were necessary, against so wild an interpretation as that of Mr. B.

The method of framing a legislative body, by electing electors, appears to me a most wise and ingenious institution. The lowest classes are not qualified to judge of the conduct of a member of the great council of the nation; but they can chuse an honest man from among their neighbours, and he can chuse a good legislator: and the legislator will be more kept to his duty, by the judgment of these chosen electors, than he would have been by the electors at large. The same reasons which shew, that one
representation

representation is useful, will, if examined, point out the advantage of a double, or in very large countries, of a triple representation. A single representation avoids the expence of collecting multitudes, the injury to their morals that the collection would occasion, their confusion, and their ignorance in making laws; a double representation avoids the same evils in chusing law-givers. It is not a wild speculation to use a method which has been adopted with unequivocal success in a case so nearly similar. By this plan electors will not be screened by multitudes, and their determination will affect that of their neighbours, and will be exposed if it be corrupt. Rewards will be held out to various classes of society, and those rewards will be honour and confidence. Such a constitution will have the intelligence of an aristocracy, without its obstinacy, its insolence, or its corruption: it makes a new rank in society, between the representatives of the people, and the people themselves; and strengthens the fabric of the constitution by gradually enlarging its foundation.—I admire a certain subordination in society; but I am provoked to see the upper classes abuse their power. Here every individual as he fails in his duty, falls out of his place. Beam after beam may be removed, but the beautiful fabric remains unshaken. I think it highly probable, that, in some future age, this mode of representation will be thought as essentially necessary to a good government, as our simple representation is supposed to be at present. Nothing but passion could have made Mr. B. blame it.†

† This mode of representation is recommended by Mr. Hume. Vide Essay 16th. It

It must have been in a fit of passion that he thought of defending the monasteries.—And what does he say for the monks? that they were not more useless than the workmen in some manufactures. Is that a reason for not altering their situation when they wish it? Will they all engage in useless manufactures? If a single monk be now usefully employed, his labour is a gain to the state, and a refutation of Mr. B.— He thinks indeed the National Assembly should have found some use for the monks; what use he does not hint: perhaps he did not know. As it is, while they are secured against want, they are exposed to the common causes that set other men to action. We should make no bad use of a mound of earth, if we scattered it over the face of the land, and trusted to nature for the produce.

But the National Assembly has “overthrown the strength of the kingdom.”† How? by a deficit of one third of the revenue. “And the revenue of the state is the state.”‖ Not literally surely; literally taken it is nonsense; the political maxim it conveys is erroneous: the revenue is no more the state, than the income of a family, is the family; or the fortune of an individual, himself. The wealth, the industry, the population, the courage, the happiness, the virtue of the state, are nearer its essence than the revenue: Mr. Burke has himself been infected by this age of calculators; and adopted an opinion fitter for the compting-

H

house,

† P. 351.

‖ P. 328.

house than the council. If "all depends on the revenue for support or reformation,"† how came the reformation in France to begin when the revenue declined? Our reformation too began, when our revenue failed: we were created by that event, which should have reduced us to nothing. Will our volunteers admit that all depends on the revenue for support? If the revenue be the state, and all depends upon it, the greater revenue must be victorious. Is it true, that the Greeks, and the Dutch, and the Swifs defended their countries from superior revenues? Is it true that America found a support, that did not depend on revenue, against the power and revenue of Great Britain? And that gallant armies, supported by that revenue, grounded their arms to men, whose rags drew on them the contempt and derision of their captives? Where is the revenue that could purchase the valour of Thermopylæ, or of the 1500 Swifs who destroyed Charles's army. Any school-boy could have reminded Mr. B. that the Carthaginians were rich, and the Romans were brave, and that the Romans defeated the Carthaginians.

I think the French have purchased liberty cheap, if they have got it for one third of their revenue. If they can retrench as much of their expenditure, they have got their liberty for nothing; nay they have saved one third of their expence. But it is absurd to estimate their revenue from the year of the revolution, when the guilty and
the

the timid fled their country ; when every man, uncertain of the issue, retrench'd his expences, to secure the means of retreat or defence ; when the obnoxious taxes were rejected, and the new ones not imposed, nor the collection arranged ; and all this in a year of the utmost distress and famine, if no revolution had taken place.

The necessary consequences of the change are not to be charged against the assembly by any man who thinks that change was necessary ; and how far the disturbances of France have been necessary consequences is a difficult question indeed. There is no instance in the history of mankind, of a nation of four and twenty millions changing at once an absolute monarchy into a free constitution. We cannot know the usual consequences of such an event from history ; by analogy we must infer, considering only the numbers of the people, and the greatness of the change, that more violence and confusion must follow, than have ever appeared in any revolution.

The National Assembly were in a situation out of all precedents ; and a man who censures them with the dogmatic violence of Mr. B. must want the modesty of a limited creature, or the coolness of a good politician.

I think the Assembly were unjust in depriving their clergy of those incomes, for which they had chosen their profession on the public faith. They had a right to diminish

nish the incomes of the order ; but the individuals and a right to their incomes for life. If the present possessors were never disturbed by reforms, reformers would escape their greatest opposition. The shocking immoralities of the French clergy palliate, but cannot excuse the injustice of the assembly. They were I believe wrong in reducing the church income so much : I believe they were wrong in not appointing a senate ; but with all their errors and their faults, I do confidently expect, it will be acknowledged by impartial posterity, that never did a council of men, lay the foundation for so great a quantity of human happiness in so short a time.

Had the National Assembly been as guilty, as I suppose them meritorious, Mr. B. should not have so violently condemned them at this time. A counter-revolution is talked of ; if it be attempted I suppose it will prove a destructive unsuccessful war. If this gentleman shall hereafter imagine that he has in the slightest degree contributed to such a war, the reflection must be painful.

Mr. B.'s book in its consequences may be hurtful to France ; to these countries it must, if its errors are not exposed. For if we follow his advice, we are never to resist, except where the " necessity admits of no discussion, and demands no evidence." † But every necessity admits of discussion ; therefore we are never to resist. We are to keep the parts of our constitution " each in the degree it exists,

† Page 144.

exists, and no greater."† Whatever inconvenience we feel from this permanency of power, we must never complain; we must never complain of abuses, because a complaint, which can never be followed by resistance, will but encrease the insolence of our rulers.

The effect of all which will be, that we will suffer abuses and inconveniences (which singly we might easily have removed), to accumulate so, that no system of opinions can enable human patience to endure them; and then our indignation will burst out in a storm, whose ravages Mr. B.'s declamation may teach us to abhor, but never can instruct us to prevent.—This was the case with the French; who, considered as one nation through several ages, are not to be blamed for reforming so much now, but for having now so much to reform; and who, if they had not adhered for centuries to his "stationary policy," had escaped the severity of Mr. B.'s reprehension.

What are the consequences of this "stationary policy" if adopted in this country? Are our governors to go on for ever, encreasing the burthens of the people, and profits of office, to buy off that opposition which those burthens provoke, and those profits invite to? Are seats in the house of commons to be always venal? Is our parliament always to employ their time in contests for personal power and emoluments? And are they never to turn their
attention

† P. 136.

attention to the means of delivering our common people from wretchedness and ignorance, dirt and oppression, superstition and disunion? Shall we never cease to sacrifice the industry, and the health and the morals of our people, to a paltry revenue from the sale of their poison? Shall we never oblige our absentees, who neglect all the ends of Providence in bestowing opulence upon men, at least to contribute adequately to the defence of that opulence? Shall our persons be for ever at the mercy of judges secured from censure, and our properties in the power of a house of commons above controul? Shall we ever love our neighbours, and admit them to their rights? And shall three more ages, or an eternal duration be required, to wipe away the stain of fruitless mistaken loyalty? Shall no continuance of submission, of allegiance, of patience, of common sufferings and fears, of common wishes, exertions, and triumph, induce us to afford to our Roman Catholic brethren a power of promoting the common prosperity? Shall we suffer administration to pursue for ever the practice of centuries, and play the two parties against each other, in order that they may securely pillage both? Shall our clergy for ever be driven by penalties to declare their assent to what they do not believe, and damn the people for not believing what they cannot understand?

Are all these things fixed for ever, and too sacred to be altered by human judgment? Impossible; the beneficent

Author

Author of our being, who has raised us from the dust, by an astonishing rapidity of improvement, to the glorious privilege of contemplating his works, and has promised to sincere, though imperfect efforts, a further inconceivable improvement ; this Being, who peopled our earth by a progress from two persons to the millions that possess it ; who sent his most important revelation among us as a grain of mustard seed, which spread, till by its progress it has covered the best part of our globe ; and who has promised, that its further progress shall “ fill the earth with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea ;” this beneficent Being, who has made all nature progressive, is not so indifferent to associated man, as to make human societies a melancholy exception to the general law ; nor, when he has been pleased to let all arts and sciences be gradually improved by human industry and experience, will he suffer the art of making his creatures happy, to sink into a “ stationary policy.”

No, we need not apprehend it ; the same Being who has poured on us encreasing blessings, will continue to do so, while we continue to deserve them. The histories of nations may convince us, that their prosperity and fall depend on their virtues and their crimes ; whether this is effected by the general laws, or the particular interference of the Ruler of all things, concerns not us ; our hopes and our conduct should be the same. And surely if this be so, few human
societies

societies have more right to expect a progress in prosperity than the Irish nation; though few have been worse governed, few have shewn more patience with their rulers, or more submission and gratitude where it was at all deserved; few have been more distressed at home, but few more ardent for their country; though too many of them have been kept from the benefits of the reformation by the mismanagement of their rulers; their mistaken religion has nothing of the sanguinary spirit, and very little of the idolatrous taint, which in other countries it presents. Mistaken laws allure us to intemperance, but we exclaim against those laws. Our faults and our misery are from the unimproved policy of our governors, but virtue and happiness from ourselves. We exceed most nations in the fervour of our religious sentiments, in the purity and ardent tenderness of our domestic lives, the most important and continual scene of virtuous affections! we have shewn that the revenue of the state is not the state, by supporting the most arduous function of the state without a revenue, by defending it completely without aid or reward; hospitable and generous in want; cheerful in misery; unmoved in danger, and moderate in triumph, we present a character that has attracted, and will attract the bounties of Heaven: only let us not be wanting to ourselves. Instead of blindly venerating our forefathers, let us nobly imitate them, by improving our present constitution, as they did theirs, by the aids of experience, reflection, and spirit.

F I N I S



Emerald Isle
70/3
14 May

